XIO3

GCACE

July/August 1994

A Newsletter produced by the Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts, 1003 Amphion St, Victoria, B.C. CANADA V8S 4G2

MEETING CHANGE

Please note that the August, September, October and November meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the library. This branch is at 3950 Cedar Hill Road at the corner of McKenzie Avenue and Cedar Hill Road, kitty-corner from the University Heights Shopping Center.

THE JULY 21st MEETING IS AT THE SAANICH-VICTORIA LIBRARY!

EDITORIAL

As the new editor of XIO3, I would like to congratulate Chris Sherwood for the excellent newsletters he has produced for the last couple of years. A job well done, and please accept our thanks. As usually happens when someone new takes over, it will take me a while to get into editors mode, so bear with me while I learn. This issue was produced with Calamus 1.09, as I have not had time to learn Calamus SL which I have just purchased. Things are much different than when I was last newsletter editor. Back then I was using a 130 XE, Roland 1012 printer and PaperClip. I am now using a 4 meg 1040 STe and a DeskJet 500 printer, but the basics are the same. As usual, the newsletter depends on input from YOU. Other members are interested in every phase of computer use, so think about writing something that you use your computer for.

Gord

G.C.A.C.E. EXECUTIVE

President: Gordon Hooper 475-0857
Vice President: John Picken 598-2386
Secretary: Rowland Grant 598-3661
Treasurer: John Towler 382-5083
Editor: Gordon Hooper 475-0857
ST librarian: Ted Skrecky 598-6173
8-bit Librarian: George Rose 652-0572
BBS Sysop: Bob Nex 642-6358
Director: Mark Ericson
Director: Steven Lemmen 595-7811
Director: Ron DePol 479-6807

CREDITS

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25.00 per year for family memberships. Membership includes a subscription to the club newlsetter, XIO3, access to over 300 8-bit and 100+ ST disks, and if you are into telecommunications, increased time and upload/download ratio on the official club BBS, the Pothole BBS, (604) 642-6795, 3-2400 bps, 24 hours, 7 days.

MEETINGS

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month except December at the Saanich/Victoria Branch of the Victoria Public Library. Meetings start at 7 pm and usually run until about 9 pm. Copying of club disks, both 8-bit and ST usually takes place at meetings, unless the librarians cannot make it with their machines.

ADVERTISING IN XIO3

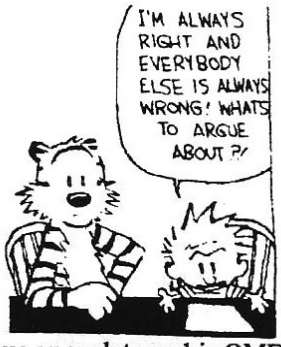
Members can place classified ads (ie: Buy, Sell, Swap) for computer related products free of charge.

Commercial advertisments must be submitted as camera-ready artwork and be pre-sized. Please mail the artwork along with payment in full to Garden City A.C.E. care of the editor. Newsletters are published in January, March, May, July, September and November. The deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month in which the newsletter is being published.

The rates for commercial ads are as follows: Full page - $15.00. Half Page - $8.00, Quarter Page - $5.00, Business Card - $3.00. Please call the Editor for additional information.

Peeking Around

by Gordon Hooper



... DOUG SKRECKY of Vancouver has been sending a comedy care package for comedically-challenged Victorians to his little brother TED about every two weeks. Doug cuts out cartoons and articles with a wry bent or dealing with black humour from the Vancouver dailies, campus newspapers and underground newspapers. As with most newspapers, they are all in black and white. I was surprised to see one article in the last bunch that was in full colour and picked it up first. It was an article on the last episode of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and gave details of the plot before it was broadcast. What was of more interest, however, was the fact it had been cut from the "National Enquirer". What's next, Doug? Pages torn from Harlequin romances? ... CHRIS SHERWOOD is contemplating two moves which JOHN PICKEN and I suggest he rethink. Chris is planning to sell his Atari computer and get married. He was good enough to sell me Calamus SL, though ... G.C.A.C.E. director MARK ERICKSON has been transferred by his company to his home town of Courtenay. Mark is happy to be returning home, but we will miss his enthusiasm and hard work. Good luck, Mark ... Welcome to new member NEIL BURDEN, a corresponding member from Gabriola Island ... Due to some programming by JOHN PICKEN, the Pothole now has about 200 megs worth of hard drive space for message bases and files to keep BOB NEX and the rest of us amused. Bob also asked John for some utilities for the hard drive, but John wimped out on writing these because he was afraid of making an error and wiping out the entire drive, which would be the end of the Pothole for a while. That's if Bob happens to have a current backup. When was the last time you made a backup, Bob? ... DENIS BATE asked me for some books on the ST, and I told him I had one, but when I looked for it, it must have jumped into the twilight zone, because I couldn't find it. GEORGE ROSE came to the rescue, however, and provided the books for Denis ... ROWLAND GRANT, BOB ETHERIDGE, NOEL BLACK, TED SKRECKY and JOHN PICKEN gathered on my patio to start work on reorganizing the eight-bit library. So far most of the work has been done by John, but the rest of us will soon have something better to do than drink beer. Not that we'd ever to be able to keep up with John at that ... CRAIG CARMICHAEL was at the June general meeting to give us an update on his OMEn operating system. He also distributed disk copies to interested members ... JORDAN HAYTHORNTHWAITE also attended that meeting and demonstrated his latest game on the Jaguar, Tempest 2000. Ted Skrecky, the CyberDrooler, abandoned disk copying and played the game the rest of the evening ... JOHN TOWLER will demonstrate Neodesk and a public domain alternate desktop at the July 21st meeting ... As noted on the cover, our August, September, October and November general meetings will be held at the Nellie McClung branch of the library at the corner of McKenzie and Cedar Hill roads. This was necessitated because the library needs our room at the Saanich-Victoria branch for storage of books collected for the new Bruce Hutchison branch at Commonwealth Pool. After the new library opens, we will likely be able to move back to Saanich-Victoria. PLEASE NOTE that the July meeting is at Saanich-Victoria ... and always remember to phone GORD at 475-0857 with any news of shortcomings and peccadilloes of fellow G.C.A.C.E members ...

Compatibility

by Douglas Skrecky

In the begining IBM controlled the mainframe computer market. Other manufacturers such as Amdahl had to produce compatible mainframes if they wanted to stay in business. Honeywell also produced mainframes which suffered from the defect that they could not run IBM software. Has anyone seen any Honeywell mainframes recently? As the market matured virtually all large computer manufacturers were forced to produce machines that could run software which was designed to run on other machines or suffer the consequences. The only exception to this has been in the supercomputer segment, which is a small specialist market which IBM had never bothered to penetrate.

As microcomputers such as PC clones and minicomputers such as IBM's AS400 gained in speed and power the market for mainframes (now called Big Iron) has dwindled. Even IBM has shifted its emphasis towards the smaller and more cost effective ES9000 series of mainframes, while the really Big Iron just rusted.

The process of enforced compliance to standards is nearing completion in the microcomputer market. Commodore International is now bankrupt and the Amiga computer is now, like the Commodore 64 and the VIC20 before it an orphan computer. Commodore's IBM clone unit is still functioning, surprise, surprise. The Atari 8-bit and Atari ST have also been abandoned, though Atari itself is still trying to make ends meet by producing a noncompatible videogame machine. (Good luck Atari - you're going to need it.) The Apple computer has been abandoned by Apple Computer Inc. The new Power PC Macintoshes all include excellent IBM clone emulators, so Apple's lastest offerings can no longer be regarded as noncompatible. Even some companies which produced the early IBM clones have gone bankrupt due to the lack of complete compatibility in their otherwise excellent

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Atari News & Rumors

by Rowland Grant

Ten years ago this month Warner Communications made the consumer products division of its Atari subsidiary into a separate entity, Atari Corp. Warner then sold Jack Tramiel (and some of his friends) a controlling interest in the new company. It was a good deal for all concerned. Warner was anxious to unload its money losing division and Jack Tramiel wanted to get back into the computer manufacturing business. Jack had left Commodore in a huff. While he had founded Commodore, Jack Tramiel did not have a majority control of it. Apparently he wanted to place his sons in executive positions in Commodore, but its board wouldn't let him. So Jack cashed out of Commodore and started a little electronics company in the Orient. What he needed was a well-known name in computers, and Atari filled the bill. Now there would be lots of executive jobs for his sons. Jack had never got over his great success with the Commodore 64 computer. Back in 1983, CPM computers costing thousands didn't have more than 64K of RAM. And here was Commodore selling a colour computer with that much RAM for as little as $200. It caught the public imagination and millions were sold. Many competing computers such as the TI99 were forced out of the market. Jack thought he could do it again, but this time with a new Atari computer.

Now we are ten years wiser. The Atari ST line is excellent and for years was the best value for money but it didn't sell like the '64. The present day successor to the Commodore 64 is not the Atari ST but the PC clone and the game console. So Atari has turned away from computers. Sam Tramiel is quoted as saying that the computer division was a "failure" and that Atari had dropped computers six months ago. It's like kicking Atari computers while they're down. Still, the decline in Atari sales began more than four years ago. It seemed to take Atari years to bring out improved computer models when it should have taken months. Atari fell behind the competition in power and price. Marketing and support was and is poor. The failure of the computer division is the responsibility of Atari's management not its computers. Of course, the intense competition among the PC clone makers has driven most of the profit out of today's market. But the Atari computers could have been a greater commercial successes than they were.

So now, after ten years, the game's the thing. The Atari annual shareholders meeting featured little else. The Tramiels are reported as looking a lot happier than at shareholders meetings in the past. Sam Tramiel announced that 150 software developers have signed up to make games for the Jaguar. He expects that 25 games will be released by December. He also stated that Atari will delay the release of games until satisfied with the quality. Looking ahead, a successor to the Jaguar games console is being developed. A new chip will be produced that provides a ten fold increase in polygon generation capacity. Atari will be displaying its latest game releases and gadgets at the summer Consumer Electronics Show. Atari will be selling a voice-modem attachment for the Jaguar. This attachment uses simultaneous voice plus data technology licensed from Philon. The attachment enables two players to link Jaguar consoles over the phone. The players can cooperate or play against each other, depending on the game. They can talk to each other through head sets at the same time. Several games currently being developed, including Doom and Club Drive, will be able to use this system. Jaguar consoles can be connected together in the same building through a comlynx network as well. It was announced that a pre-release version of Wolfenstein 3D will be available soon at Blockbuster Video.

There were announcements prior to the shareholders meeting. Bob Brodie, Atari's main link with its computer users has left for another job. Bob was prominent in Atari User groups in California before he joined Atari Corp. Bob seemed to get on well with the Tramiels, and he was an important source of reliable information. When Atari gave all of its attention to the Jaguar console and games, Bob became a sort of a Jaguar sales manager. His contact with Atari computer users was a spare time activity. As he was on the road most of the time and wanted to be home more, Bob joined a software company close by in San Francisco. Bob will be director of technical support for GSCorp, a developer of NeXT Step applications. Rumours are that Bob Brodie will not be replaced. Atari also announced that Sigma Designs has an exclusive license to use Jaguar technology in the creation of game cards for PC computers. These cards will combine Jaguar chips with Sigma's Reel Magic full motion video technology. The Jaguar/Sigma card will use an installed CD-ROM drive, not cartridges. The video will deliver 30 frames per second of animation using 32000 colours and 1024x768 resolution. This card could expand the market for Jaguar games to ten million PC users. It is expected that the first Sigma/Jaguar cards may be available by December for about $500. There is no direct competition here with the Jaguar console which sells for half that price.

Jaguar software development kits contained emulator boards for use in Atari TT computers or PC clones. However, most game software for other platforms is now developed using Silicon Graphics work stations. A lot of special software is available for these work stations. The animation in the movie Jurassic Park was created using such a system. Atari has announced that it too will move to Silicon Graphics work stations. The software for graphics and animation on the Jaguar will be provided by Wavefront Technologies Inc. Wavefront's Gameware system is used by many of the leading video game producers. There are rumours that Sega has bought out the company that makes the Jaguar development kits.Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the sudden switch? Clearly, where Jaguar development is concerned, Atari is no longer considering its own computers. But there are still some rumours about a new Atari computer specialised for the handling of music production, call it a music workstation. The Falcon computer has many of the characteristics of a music workstation. A further development of the Falcon computer might be all that is needed. Atari has a good reputation in the music world, this could be a niche that merits continued development. This rumour was confirmed recently when Atari announced that it is licensing Falcon 030 technology to C Lab GmBH in Germany.

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C Lab will be producing a "pro audio, broadcast and multi media workstation". Details of this product will be released later.

At the moment Atari has no resources for anything but the Jaguar and its games. While the CD-ROM drive for the Jaguar is ready, the software driver for it is not. The people who were upgrading GEM and MultiTOS have dropped these projects and are concentrating on getting the CD ROM software ready. The specifications for TOS 5 have been out for awhile, but now it looks like the software itself may never be implemented. In the meantime Atari has been frantically preparing exhibits for the Summer Consumer Electronics Show. A number of games were promised for May and June but none have shown up as yet. This is a serious matter. No new games means fewer Jaguar sales. The long awaited Alien vs Predator game is still not ready for production. Rebellion Games seems to be taking forever on the project. Desperate (or maybe just embarrassed) Atari has flown in two of Rebellion's programmers to Sunnyvale and has pulled staff off other projects to help them finish the game. Of course, Wolfenstein 3D is in production. Also an independent is reported to have put the game Brutal Sports Football into production. While Atari is not developing a virtual reality system for the Jaguar, another manufacturer is developing VR helmets for a number of game systems including the Jaguar. A company called "All Systems Go" is producing a video juke box (?) for the Jaguar. There are rumours that Bally Midway is interested in using the Jaguar chip set in its coin operated games. And there are rumours that Sega may be signing up to make games for the Jaguar! Not too much progress, but lots of activity.

While Atari is concentrating on the U.S. market for the Jaguar, the ground is being prepared for future sales in Europe. At an annual video game show in London (ECT show) Atari displayed the Jaguar game console. A number of almost finished Jaguar games were demonstrated by British developers such as Ocean, US Gold, Domark and Zepplin. The Jaguar itself won the best hardware award, beating out 3DO, CD32 and Reel Magic. Reports are just coming in from the summer Consumer Electronics Show (or CES) in Chicago. This show is for dealers and wholesalers. It is important as orders for the December holiday season are made in the summer or early fall. Nintendo had rented about half of the area set aside for video games. Sega didn't show until the last minute when it had to take a space in the basement. Atari was right across from Nintendo and its displays were crowded. The Jaguar CD was on display showing full motion video using film clips from Jaws, Star Wars etc. Apparently a cartridge will be used to record game save information and high scores for Jaguar CD games. Another CD setup was running a "virtual light machine" display.

There were at about forty game display kiosks in the Atari area at the CES. Some of the games were non playable demos, but there were many games that visitors could try out for themselves. Doom was on display, looking very impressive. Unfortunately Doom would lock up rather easily if the player pressed the wrong button. Looks like it needs error checking routines. Eventually Doom was removed from display. While few games had reached the stage where they could be released for sale, most were quite playable. The reports suggest that the Jaguar has a bunch of winners coming up (called"killer games" in the industry). These are Kasumi Ninja, Iron Soldier, UltraVortex, Doom, Wolfenstein and Alien vs Predator. There seems to be no complaint on the game play of these. Kasumi Ninja and A vs P were rated as outstanding. Iron Soldier and Ultra Vortex haven't been seen before. These make use of the very rapid polygon mapping capability of the Jaguar. In Iron Soldier the player takes the view point of a giant robot and one can see in all directions including up and down. Ultra Vortex is a two player fighting game. There were many other titles on display such as Club Drive, Blue Lightning, Rayman (a Mario Bros type game). When will they be available? Well A vs P, Kasumi Ninja, Doom and Club Drive are nearing completion and should be out by September (let's hope). By all reports, this was the best CES show put on by Atari in years. Atari was absent from the famous CEBIT show in Germany that recorded 700,000 visitors. The space where Atari's booth should have been was occupied by Commodore (a kind of last hurrah). Apparently Commodore's booth was surrounded by displays of Atari software and hardware produce in Germany. Compo, a well known distributor of Atari products, had lots of new items on display. It showed the Medusa TOS work station that runs four times as fast as the TT. There was a CD-ROM drive that connects to the cartridge port of a ST/TT/Falcon and uses the MetaDOS driver. Also displayed was Screen Eyes Plus, a real-time video digitizer. Most of Compo's new items were for the Atari Falcon. These included new items for musicians: Musicom 2, a direct to disk stereo recording system, and Trackom, a 16 bit sound tracker that can handle up to ten tracks. Video resources for the Falcon included FalcoGen, a professional Genlock, and Overlay presentation and video titling software. Other hardware was Screenblaster-2, a video extender providing a 1280x960 resolution with 16 colours. Steinberg, a very prominent supporter of the music industry, was present with Cubase Audio 16 for the Falcon. It handles 16 direct to disk audio tracks. Also displayed was the sound sample editor Avalon-2. Of interest was Janus, an ST emulator for the PC. Unlike Gemulator which is entirely software, Janus is mostly hardware. It uses a 68000 chip running at 16 Mhz and runs as fast as a Mega STe. In special dual mode which uses PC circuitry as well, Janus runs 12 times as fast as a standard ST.

There was also the ProTOS Atari show at Ulm in Germany. The displays were run mainly by Falcon and Medusa computers. Displayed were the Falcophone voicemail system. Gut'nberg showed its DTP word processor which uses SpeedoGDOS fonts. Omikron demonstrated Freeway, an SQL type database, Omikron BASIC and the latest version of K-spread. R.O.M. develops graphics software such as Xact for preparing character sets (even if 3D), and Xact Draw for vector drawing. In addition they market CADANS CAD-CAM software. Digital Arts was present with the latest versions of DA Vector, DA Picture, DA Movie, DA Photo and DA Layout. Eickman displayed an inexpensive Falcon case and a barcode reader/writer. Maxon Computer was present. It publishes ST Computer in Germany. This magazine is for serious ST users and has a circulation of about 60,000. Maxon's other magazine, Kickstart for the Amiga was not nearly as popular and had to cease publication some time ago. The impression one gets from the continuing development of excellent software and hardware for Atari computers in Germany is that the ST line is far from finished there.

According to Bob Glendow, the head of Atari in Europe, about 80,000

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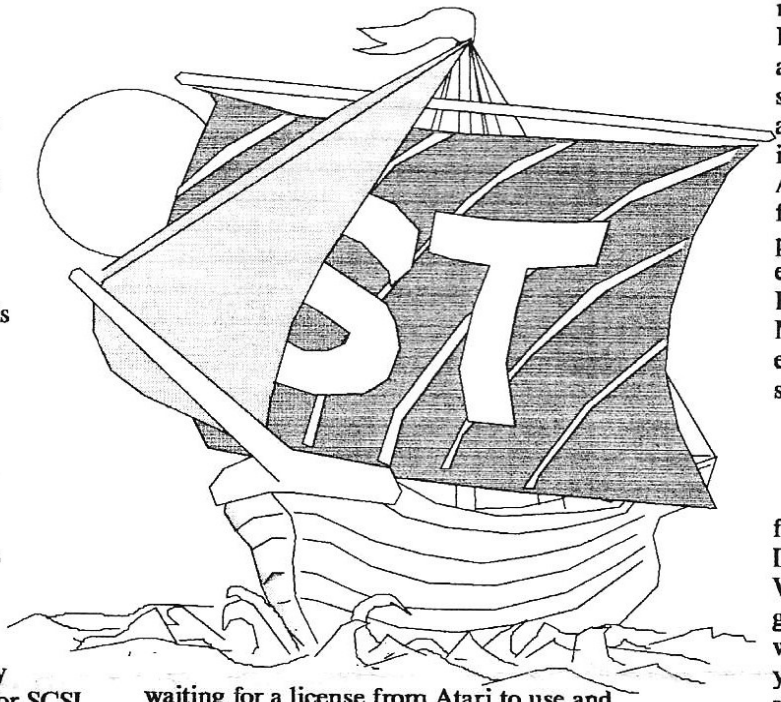
Falcon computers had been sold in Europe by the end of March this year. This number has been disputed and the comments in the Atari annual report that the Falcon shipped "in small quantities" seems indicate a much smaller number. Still, the base of Falcon computers seems to be gradually expanding. Even in our vicinity, many ST enthusiasts are buying Falcon computers. Vantari reported that the Falcon has been selling well through music outlets in Vancouver. At a recent meeting they found that half of the members present were now Falcon owners. Still there are mixed signals from Atari. It is rumoured that Jack Tramiel "almost blew a gasket" when he learned of son Sam's statement that Atari was out of the computer market. In spite of the annual report's comment that the Atari "does not expect sales of this product to be material in the future", Atari later made a much more positive announcement. They said that "Atari will continue to manufacture and support the Falcon 030 in its current configuration as the market demands". They went on to say "Atari is considering further computer products based on the Jaguar chip set".

The Atari computer market is far from finished. It is estimated that about three million Atari ST's are still in use world wide. I have seen reports that the game Elite-2 (Atari version) sold half a million copies in 1993. There is still a market for good software and hardware for the ST. ICD has released the Link-2 interface. This is similar to its predecessor except that it has a power indicator light and supports parity settings. So it's just plug and go for SCSI equipment. Any combination of eight devices can be chained together: hard drives, floptical drives, CD-ROMs, Bernoulli tape, Syquest cartridge drives and so on. ICD also released an update of its PRO utilities. Its AllRelative Software has released the Audio CD Master. This product uses audio CD's in a CD-ROM drive. The music can be manipulated, mixed with other digital sound and saved as audio CD output. Cybercube Research in Canada has released Inshape, a 3-D modeller and shader package for the Falcon and TT. Cybercube has also produced an accelerator board for the TT. Anodyne Software of Ottawa has released EXTENDOS, a low cost extension of TOS which provides for reading CD-ROMs in standard format. Comtext has developed Atari-to-Novell network cards for all Megas and the TT. Black Scorpion Software has produced Studio24, an image editor and manipulator for the Falcon. Another company doing image software for the Falcon is Team Company. Their video software is a collection of tools for painting, morphing, texturing, animation and overlays. Pleiades Research is advertising Digital Storefront, voicemail hardware and software for the Falcon. There are rumours that someone in Aachen Germany has developed a RAM extension board for all ST's. The board allows the installation of up to 12 MB of normal ST RAM. This might require a modification of TOS.

The Wizztronics 68040 accelerator board has not been released. It is still waiting for a license from Atari to use and modify TOS. However, Wizztronics has fixed the bugs in its DEKA2 interface that allows the use of a PC keyboard with an ST or Falcon. Of course the existing ST keyboard can be used separately from the main console. This requires special fittings, but they are available from various sources such as ATY Computer in Oakland California. Gribnif software has not released Neodesk 4. Apparently they are adding some more features including the ability to use Windows icons and SpeedoGDOS. The manual is being completed, so Neodesk 4 should be available soon. Also Gribnif is rumoured to be working on new versions of its STeno (editor) and STalker (terminal) software.



Richter Distributor is still working on GFA BASIC 4. The interpreter is working but not the compiler. They used the C language for programming, but the results were not satisfactory. I understand that the whole project is being restarted from scratch.

Calamus, the mainstay desktop publishing software for the ST/TT, is also being developed for Windows NT computers. A number of Calamus programmers have left, and this has been taken to mean that there will be no Calamus upgrades for the ST line. Now we learn that these programmers have established their own company to produce new program modules for the current Calamus SL. Other alarms were sounded when someone from HISOFT was heard to say that they are switching to the DOS/Windows market. HISOFT, one of the main software supporters for the Falcon, has denied this. The Atari annual report notes that there was some old inventory of ST, TT, XE and Portfolio computers. This inventory has been written off as Atari expects "minimal sales" from it. We might expect low retail prices too, but in the US this old equipment is not exactly a bargain. However, I have heard that recently Mega2 ST's were being sold for the equivalent of $140 in a supermarket in France!

I have a recent article from the Financial Times (thanks Doug) entitled "Cashing in on the Video Game Wars". The video games industry is immense. It is worth about 15 billion dollars a year. The value of game software alone is greater than the box office sales of the entire movie industry in the U.S. Game software probably makes as much as the entire recording industry. This major industry is dominated by two game machine makers and a handful of large software houses. For years the Nintendo game consoles have dominated the market. However after its initial successes, Nintendo allowed itself to be overtaken technically by Sega. Sega game machines are now pulling abreast of Nintendo in sales. In such a vast market there should be room for more major participants, but all others have been forced out. Games in the past consisted of small images called sprites that could be moved by the player over a scrolling background image. There

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was little sound except for special effects. The ultimate game technology would be computer generated moving images and sound, of cinema quality, under the complete control of the game player. Something closer to this ideal is now possible. It is referred to as full motion video. It can be packaged in a small case, and can be sold for as little $250. Two companies, 3DO and Atari have introduced equipment capable of full motion video, and are challenging Nintendo and Sega for a share of the market. Nintendo and Sega are scrambling to catch up before these new rivals get established, but their comparable machines will not be out for another year at least. To hold their position, these two have adopted different strategies. Nintendo has begun to produce very elaborate, graphically impressive games that drive its Super Nintendo machines to the limit. Sega is adding more graphics capabilities to its current Genesis games system, and is making new games to exploit it. Atari and 3DO have the advanced systems but they lack the games that everybody would want to buy. They have a few months to create those games and sell enough game consoles to capture a profitable share of the market. It's going to be close.

The stock market analysts are already making pronouncements. They are giving 3DO a fifty-fifty chance of survival. Atari has been written off. Not enough Jaguar systems have been sold, they say, and there is hardly any software. One fund manager sold Atari shares short and then made public pronouncements that Atari was headed for bankruptcy. Atari countered with a news release that they had the resources ($35 million) to finance business operations for 1994. Sam Tramiel said that Atari plans to ship 300,000 Jaguar units this year and will have between 30 and 50 game titles out before December. "Our focus is on software", he said. Market analysts don't have much of a track record when it comes to predicting the future. But they can influence stock prices. Recently, Atari's shares dropped below $4 in large volume trading. A better gauge of the future might be some opinions from dealers and buyers at CES. They agreed that Sega was leading and still had sales momentum. They felt that 3DO was out of it, too expensive, software mostly hype. But for Atari there was little criticism, the attitude was wait and see.

The Pothole BBS

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Atari 8-Bit Affairs

by Rowland Grant

I have received the final issue of Atari Classics, or at least the last issue managed by Ben Poehland and published by Unicorn Publications. I understand that other Atari 8-bit enthusiasts offered to take over the publication and combine forces with Ben in the management. Apparently Ben felt that things would be simpler if he made a clean break. So an effort will be made to refund the unfilled subscriptions. This is the proper thing to do. Not like Antic magazine, for instance, that siphoned all the subscribers money over to another company (PC Home Journal) and then folded. The refunds policy also clears the way for a successor, and there is a successor. Atari Classics will be continued as a "fresh venture" by a group of brave (crazy?) enthusiasts in California (where else?). The new address is: Atari Classics, 5507 Langford Court, Concord, California, U.S.A. 94521-1614. As before it will be published on a bi-monthly basis. A software disk will be issued three times a year. Subscription rates are as before, $30 for one year to Canada and $9.00 for the disks. The new editor is Jim Hood. He is busy putting together an organisation that would match the previous lineup. The new Atari Classics will be looking for contributors as well as subscribers. The Atari 8-bit world is too small now for spectators. Ben Poehland and the regular contributors to the old Atari Classics created an excellent magazine. I hope that we will continue to enjoy their writings in the new Atari Classics.

Fine Tooned Engineering has delayed the release of its Mars-8 board. Apparently the design is undergoing a major revision. The Mars-8 board fits inside (?) an Atari 800XL and attaches to the parallel bus. It has sockets for up to 4MB of RAM (with battery backup) and a number of ROM chips. The ROMs can be new operating systems, Sparta DOS X, and selections from the whole range of OSS languages: Mac65, Action!, BASIC XL, BASIC XE. In addition there will be room for R-Time8 circuitry. There are reports that the Mars-8 board will also work with a 65C816 microprocessor. Hearing this, someone remarked: "how much can you stuff into a 800XL and still close the lid?". Fine Tooned Engineering has also bought out Newell Industries. Currently Newell produces RAM upgrade boards for XL and XE computers. However, Newell marketed a much wider range of products in the past. I seem to recall that there were alternate operating system boards, and other modifications such as the 80 column Omniview and the built in Omnimon memory monitor. Fine Tooned seems to be consolidating much of the remaining Atari 8-bit industry.

John Harris has upgraded Sparta DOS for Fine Tooned Engineering. The latest shareware version is 3.2g (on the Pothole as FTE32G.ARC). This brings the disk version much closer in function to the Sparta DOS X cartridge. A few commands have been changed, for instance CWD is now CD, CREDIR becomes MD and DELDIR becomes RD. Now RD.COM will have to be renamed (RM.COM). The TYPE function is now supposed to handle any length of line. Some have reported that it doesn't. There are error messages in English at last. Drive 9 is supported, and could be the default RAM disk. Also you can no longer copy a file to itself, a good precaution. There may be some more work to do on this version. I have heard that under some conditions it does not close files that have been opened. There is also a Sparta DOS 3.2gx version for use with the BASIC XE cartridge. Another release is a disk version of the MAC65 assembler. At the moment this is in disk image format used by Atari 8-bit emulators or SIO2PC storage. This version of MAC65 has most of the features of the cartridge version along with some additional commands that were on the original disk version.

Textpro 5.20, the latest and perhaps final version of this excellent word processor, should be available soon. Ron Riche has circulated a test version of Textpro that supports up to 64 simultaneous edit windows of 16K each or 8 linked documents of 128K each. Of course you will need at least one megabyte of RAM for all this. Large amounts of bank switched RAM have been available for some time. It is good to see new software versions able to make use of it. On this topic, I understand that one of the original programmers of SynCalc spreadsheet has bought back the rights to it (from Broderbund). There are rumours that SynCalc may be reissued with the capability to use any extra RAM available.

Darek Mihoca has released PC XFORMER 2.0 to the public domain. This is PC software that emulates an Atari 800 or 800XL. It should be available on many bulletin boards as XF2.ZIP. The PC XFORMER requires a '386 PC with VGA colour graphics. The emulation is not complete. Sound is not supported, neither is collision detection, this makes it unsatisfactory for games. Otherwise, PC XFORMER has been reported to run most Atari 8-bit software quite well (except maybe Sparta DOS). A '386 PC running at 33 MHz is needed to match the speed of an Atari 800 with this emulator. Using the latest and fastest PC's one could increase the speed ten fold or more. Software must be in a disk image file of the kind created by SIO2PC or perhaps the ST XFORMER. A later version of PC XFORMER will be released as shareware. This will feature extra RAM access beyond 48K, sound and full graphics. Registration will cost about $30. Registered users will receive full documentation and support.

Our own John Picken has released a final version of his XL2 program. This enables you to run a 130 XE as if it were two XL computers and switch between them with a keystroke. XL2 works best with Sparta DOS and MyDOS. It will handle software in file form mainly. If you have more than 128K of RAM, the additional memory can be set up as a RAM disk. John has created a RAM disk program that is

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compatible with Sparta DOS. He has also modified MyDOS so that it can use this RAM disk. Another modified MyDOS can handle large megabyte Ram disks. Thus you can run two programs using XL2 and pass information between them via the RAM disk. John has renamed his RAM disk program RM.COM and has upgraded it so that drive 9 can be used. This makes it compatible with the latest Sparta DOS 3.2G.

As I have reported elsewhere Don Bell has kindly sent us 125 8-bit disks. These are some of the original disks that Don used in preparing his Bellcom public domain collection. They will be stored in our library as a resource for the creation of our new series of documented club disks. For those who may be interested I am compiling a list of these disks. Some of this software we already have, but there is a surprising amount of new stuff. In this collection are three Antic disks, four KESOFT disks, 18 Page 6 PD library disks and 27 disks from the North of Scotland Atari User Group (NOSAUG) PD library. The balance are a miscellaneous collection from all over, including a copy of Ted Skrecky's Font Data Writer that originated right here! Every type of program is represented, there are lots of games and utilities that I have not seen before. In addition to this windfall, we have received TWAUG newsletter issue 9 and disk. Two of Doug Skrecky's programs, THINK! and SUPERHOP are on the TWAUG disk. NWPAC has sent us a copy of their PD library catalogue. This is preliminary to exchanging library disks. We also have received the DACE "disks of the month" for May which contained the shareware Sparta DOS tool kit and other interesting utilities.

Compatibility

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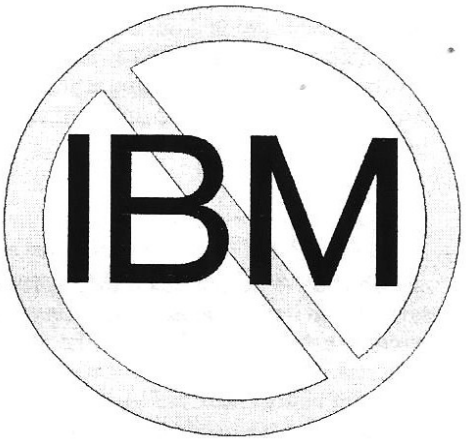
machines. Has anyone heard any news about the Canadian built Hyperion computer recently?

We can see the trend towards compatiblity even in Atari computers. The 8-bits could not use a standard printer without an extra interface. The ST could use a standard printer, but could not produce IBM readible disks without an IBM formating program. The STE's could write IBM readible disks without a special formating program, but could not use a standard VGA monitor. The Falcon can use a standard VGA monitor, but alas still can not run IBM programs.

Videogame machines are as yet in an earlier stage of evolution towards compatibility. No one standard is as yet dominant. However the two front runners, Nintendo and Sega apparently plan on making their new machines backwards compatible with their old ones. Although no manufacturers have attempted as yet to manufacture Nintendo or Sega videogame clones, I suspect that a clone machine may ultimately win the videogame wars. Even now cheap PC's are the major competition for videogame machines. Lose the hard disk, keyboard, monitor and most of the RAM from an IBM clone and you have a rather intriguing competitor in the videogame market. Charge a fee for the cartridge as Nintendo and Sega do to make a profit and I suspect an IBM clone videogame machine could really clean up.

There would certainly be no problem with a lack of videogames to port over to cartridge format, given the huge installed base of PC game software. Both the 3D0 and Atari Jaguar units have been all but written off by stock market analysts because of the lack of software for these non-compatible machines. I had thought that the Jaguar would have retained some degree of compatibility with the old Atari ST line just to facilitate software development, but such does not appear to be the case.

Anyone interested in building an IBM clone videogame machine?



GCACE MEETINGS

by Rowland Grant

The May general meeting featured a demonstration of Spectre GCR by John Towler. Spectre GCR is a Macintosh emulator that runs on a ST. It runs most of the older monochrome Mac software. John spent some time demonstrating and explaining the Mac desktop and operating system. The Mac system is another world, both better and worse than the Atari GEM system. Before John got started, Jordan Haythornthwaite set up his Jaguar game machine and demonstrated Tempest 2000, the latest release. Ted Skrecky tried his hand at this game. One needs a bit of practice to get very far with it.

At the general meeting in June, John Picken and Gordon Hooper showed us how an Atari 130XE running PaperClip can drive a Hewlett-Packard Deskjet. John and Gord had quite a time constructing a printer driver. However the results were worth it. John pointed out that most Atari 8-bit software was oriented to using the Epson dot matrix system and wouldn't work very well on a very different system like the Hewlett-Packard.

Don Bell of Bellcom shut down his superb Atari 8-bit public domain software service and had some items left over. Don wrote to ask if we could use some of this material. We wrote back "yes please", so Don sent us two boxes of goodies. There was some commercial software such as Peachtree (accounting), Syntrend, two copies of Atari Writer spell checker and the ST game Top Gun. There were also two 9 volt power supplies, an SIO cable and a RF cable. These items were sold to club members to defray Don's postage expenses. In one of the boxes were about 128 floppy disks of public domain material. Don mentioned that some of the programs may not run, but most of them seem OK. This windfall is going to be very useful when we get on to reorganising the 8-bit library. Many thanks to Don bell for thinking of us.

Geoff Corry, a former member, has bought a new PC clone as a component in his MIDI sound system. Geoff finds that he does not have enough room in his townhouse for both the clone and his Atari 8-bit. So he is slowly dismantling his Atari system. Geoff has given some of his Atari books and magazines to the Club. He has also passed on a few pieces of his equipment to "deserving" members who are putting them to good use. Many thanks to Geoff for his kindness to Classic Atari users.

Craig Carmichael has released OMEn version 2.46, the Open Multi-tasking Environment. Craig attended the June meeting and gave out demo copies of OMEn and some notes to go with them. OMEn is also posted on the Pothole BBS. OMEn has been given favourable notice in ST Format and there was a rather nice article in the June ST Review. International recognition should be a great help. Most of the development work has been done on the ST version of OMEn. Now Craig will be concentrating on getting the Macintosh version fully functional.

John Picken "volunteered" to come up with some ideas on the reorganisation of our 8-bit public domain library. At the June general meeting we organised a special interest group meeting for the 8-bit library. Six members attended. That's a better turn out than usual (although there was some free beer). The weather was great so we gathered on Gordon Hooper's patio. John had a two-page report ready. The report outlined just about everything that we needed to consider. The existing 8-bit library will now be the library resource. From it we will create the "official" library disks. These library disks will be properly catalogued and possibly cross-referenced. Each disk will have a boot program that identifies the disk. Also each disk will contain a readme file that describes the program files on the disk. A standard label will be prepared. We will begin by selecting what we consider to be the best programs in our resource collection. John Picken has agreed to start the work. This will provide a tangible pattern for others to follow. And there's got to be others!

Gordon announced that our monthly general meetings will have to move to the Nellie McClung branch of the public library in August. This is in or near the University Heights shopping centre. We have been meeting in the Saanich public library for most of the last eight years. Unfortunately the Saanich branch needs the conference room for book storage, at least for the remainder of this year.